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INEZ DE CASTRO

NEWDIGATE PRIZE POEM · RECITED
IN THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE
OXFORD · 13 JUNE 1883 · BY BOWYER
NICHOLS · COMMONER OF BALLIOL
COLLEGE

Ω ΔΥΣΤΑΝΟΣ
ΟΥΤΕ ΒΡΟΤΟΙΣΙΝ ΟΥΤ ΕΝ ΝΕΚΡΟΙΣΙΝ
ΜΕΤΟΙΚΟΣ ΟΥ ΖΩΣΙΝ ΟΥ ΘΑΝΟΥΣΙΝ
SOPHOCLES ANT. 850—2.

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SIMPKIN MARSHALL & CO.
M'DCCC'LXXXIII

OXFORD
UPSTONE AND DOE PRINTERS
QUEEN STREET

*Could song repass the portal
Where silent feet are led ;
Could loving lips of mortal
Praise duly loves long dead,
Or catch that golden glory
The mists of time make dim,
No sweeter sadder story
Than this were told by him.*

*Love wrought her life and shattered ;
Death found and left her fair ;
Five hundred years have scattered
The marvel of her hair.
Such gifts to them that know him
Love gives at last to keep ;
Remembrance in a poem,
Forgetfulness in sleep.*

J. W. M.

FRATELLI, A UN TEMPO STESSO AMORE E MORTE
INGENERÒ LA SORTE.

COSE QUAGGIÙ SÌ BELLE
ALTRE IL MONDO NON HA, NON HAN LE STELLE.

Leopardi

INEZ DE CASTRO

Of all the gifts God gives and takes away
Between the gold of youth and age's grey,
Of all that wise or foolish count of worth
Between the mortal goals of death and birth,
Of things still new and old beneath the sun,
There is one flawless thing and only one :
Briefer and lighter and slighter than the rest,
And yet the longest, strongest, perfectest ;
This only lives a day before our eyes
And is the only thing that never dies,
As some flower fading ere the afternoon
Might shine at eve a star beside the moon ;
The one immortal gift to mortals given,
Beauty, the shadow thrown on earth by heaven.

Strange, that this thing which never all their tears
Could bring again to eyes made dim by years,

That once looked May-time, and not all their love
To lovers' hearts that once were fain thereof,
And would have died to save it, should outlast
All labours and all treasures of the past,
Alone should make the tyrant Time its friend,
And triumph over Death to the world's end.

Strange, that the names which men have once
held royal

For beauty's sake and crowned, should make men
loyal

For sake of beauty still, still make men glad
For unseen sake of favour that they had ;
Because for these dead heroes fought and fell,
Because of these dead poets loved to tell,
Dead ladies who were lovely long ago,
Dead knights and kings who long since loved them so,
Their deathless praise and worship can fulfil
The mouths of lovers and of singers still.
Dead faces throng around them : from on high,
Like milky clouds upon a moonlight sky,
They lean along Time's cold and starry height
With dumb pale lips and sad eyes quenched of sight,
And make the empearléd dusk so beautiful

That the large light of day looks void and dull ;
Alas, and still the lonely dreamer deems
No face so fair as those that fill his dreams.

Yet what is this the ancient singer saith
Of beauty's wings and tardier feet of death ?
How in their haunting broken wisdom ran
Those tender words of the Megarian ?

*Ah fools and blind who for the dead make moan,
And not for youth's fair blossom overblown.*

Well, she at least of whom I tell to-day,
Whose bloom of life had scarce outlived its May,
When death came quick upon her, though she knew
More evil days than good where both were few,—
Poor queen, who felt enough of hate and strife
Beat round her bright and blameless brows in life,
Those brows crowned afterward in such strange wise
When Love and Death strove with mad rivalries ;
One grief at least she knew not : Time that brings
And takes away all sad, all pleasant things,
Took not away two fateful gifts it brought
Whose joys outweighed all sorrows that they
wrought,

The beauty and the love that were her blame,

The love and beauty that are still her fame.

But whatsoe'er consoled her or opprest,
Misfortune was the thing she knew the best,
Who even before her birth had come to her,
And all her life a constant minister
Failed nor relented with her failing breath,
But followed through the dusky gates of death.
This was the price she paid for being fair,
For long white throat and honey-coloured hair ;
This was the debt enforced by jealous fate,
Which suffers none to be too fortunate,
Which drave her blind and helpless to her doom,
Which slew her children and despoiled her tomb.

What were her thoughts when on that summer
morn,

The fresh light glancing on the lines of corn,
Gently disparted by the early breeze,
Sparkling to silver on the olive trees,
She leaned her from the narrow convent-sill,
And looked out eastward, while adown the hill
Her lord passed swift and careless, girt around
With peaceful train of man and horse and hound,
And sun and shadow played on horn and spear,

And fainter grew the echoes of their cheer,
Leaving her lonelier, till they vanished soon,
Lost in green glooms and mysteries of June ?
Yet still she watched and listened at her place,
Silent, a dreaming trouble on her face,
And in her eyes a distant vague dismay,
Like one whose ominous vision far away
Foretells disaster, or like her who stood
Hard by that threshold whence she felt the blood
Already drip, and with wild lips and pale
Wailed for the wings of the shrill nightingale.
What did she see then ? what fond doubts or fears
Shook at her heart and murmured in her ears ?
Her doom was close upon her ; at the gate
Sate Death dense-veiled, dumb, patient, obdurate,
Contented well to bide a little yet,
Whose time must come before the sun be set.
But him, I think, she saw not ; no impress
Of coming ill brought conscious heaviness.
Some sadness vexed her, but she knew not what ;
Things long since out of mind, and half forgot,
Came crowding on her strangely ; strangely seemed
The past to beckon her, as though she dreamed

And gained from sleep what sleep alone supplies,
Words on dead lips, remembrance in dead eyes.
Inly she seemed with fixed unshrinking gaze
To watch the pageant of her own old days
Troop by her, and with soul dispassionate
Could judge her own like any alien fate.
First on her vision rose, still wreathed in light
Indelibly, irrevocably bright,
And vocal with mysterious harmony,
Like music played one knows not where nor why,
Like hidden harps and lutes by hands unseen
Touched into sound,—the long lost days serene
Of childhood, days whose memory seemed to bring
Magical moods and intervals of spring,
Singing of birds, and growth of flowers, and earth
Kissed by indulgent April to new birth.
Peace and tranquillity came once again,
Innocent joys and loves that brought no pain ;
Herself and Constance once more side by side
Trod the same path, with nothing to divide
Sisterly soul from soul, no jealous grief,
No fault to breed deceit and disbelief.
Thus they grew up together. Still more fast

Became the bond when childhood's days were past,
And nought it seemed their love could e'er dispart;
Twain were the maidens and they had one heart :
Constance the Princess, tall and slim and fair,
With proud pale head enwreathed with soft dark hair,
And visionary eyes that seemed to see
Shadows already of the things to be,
As oft, men say, those early doomed to die
Wear on their brows the badge of destiny :
Inez, the younger by a year or more,
Less tall but not less fair, albeit she bore
That stain upon her birth, in grace and mien
Made, like her cousin, to be crowned a queen ;
A marvel among queens. How shall be told
The glory of her hair ? which of fine gold
By angels' hands seemed woven wondrously,
That even the sad might be made glad to see ;
Yet joy's own self might turn to grief and sigh
To think that things so sweet must fade and die.
Alas, and what avail to strive in rhyme
To count the wreckage of the seas of time ?
The simplest things are ever the most deep,
Such common things as life and love and sleep ;

The saddest those which every eye and tongue
Has known and mourned for since the world was
 young,
That summer dies, that beauty cannot stay,
But having lived its hour falls quite away ;
The meaning music nurses at its heart ;
The ultimate sorrow at the soul of art.
But little wont are thoughts of death and age
To cross the path of youth's brief pilgrimage,
And those whom wisdom of this sort hath blest
Are haply nowise happier than the rest.
At least to Inez with thoughts backward bent
On things so gracious and so innocent,
Those distant days looked cloudless as the skies
That dreamed the seventh day o'er Paradise.
And now her thought passed onward winged and fleet
Unto that time they twain went forth to meet
The Prince to whom her cousin should be bride,
And to that meeting ; this and all beside
As through some golden veil she seemed to see
Shot with sharp lights of finer memory ;
The feasting and the dancing and the hours
Still resonant with music, sweet with flowers ;

How, led by Pedro, who had yet no eyes
For any but his bride, in royal guise
They came to Lisbon, and how great and fair
The city looked to her ; how all the air
Was live with festival and loud with chime
Of swinging bells ; and how for the first time
She saw the King, who even then looked old,
And how she feared his glances keen and cold.
Feeble he seemed, and subtle, haggard-eyed,
And worn before his day with craft and pride,
Grey, weary, and capricious, trusting none,
Half vain, half jealous even of his son.

And then,—how soon,—the change came ; ah, so
plain

Why must she see it all to-day again ?
The change that made a new thing of her life,
Baptising it in waters strange of strife ;
The joy and bitterness, the doubts and fears,
The aching fever and the frequent tears,
Hope and revulsion, conscience that relents,
Remorse that falters, passion that repents ;
The struggling soul by sin and grief opprest
That fain would flee away and be at rest ;

The love that Pedro bare her, strong as fate,
And blind as fear, and pitiless as hate,
Sad privilege, and sadder still for this,
The price that bought it was another's bliss;
The treachery to Constance, and her grief
Irreparable, vacant of relief,
Though words should fall like fire and tears like
rain ;

The broken bond, the friendship rent in twain ;
Till death that came at last looked less forlorn
Than life whose love thus doubly was forsworn.

But that was long ago ; ten years had gone
Now, and so many things been thought and done
Since Constance found her peace among the dead
And the priests murmured masses o'er her head.
Ten years ; to Inez they might well seem less,
For spite of time's incessant stir and stress,
We rather measure it by what it brings
Of inward issue than by outward things,
By spiritual reaches gained or lost,
And he lives longest who has felt the most ;
The true vicissitudes are of the soul,—
And those ten years looked like one single whole :

The self-same hopes and fears, the self-same range
Of cares and consolations void of change ;
Her life with Pedro and his steadfast love
Which time could tame not nor temptation move ;
The old King's vigilant and constant hate
Of her and of her brethren, grown of late
Stronger and stealthier, fed anew by fear
As step by step he felt his end draw near,
And saw with his star's waning their star rise,
And listened closelier to their enemies ;
For enemies they had, nor far nor few,
And dangers thickened daily, as she knew.
Her thoughts were swift and active, as men say
Minds of sick men upon their dying day
Are oft-times keenest, having gained at length
A ghostly interval of peace and strength,
Their wanderings and weakness all forgot ;
And she was dying, though she knew it not.

For the road thronged already with her foes.
Yea, even now a sudden clamour rose
From the courtyard below,—a broken sound
Of cries, a dint of hoofs upon the ground,
Baying of dogs, unwonted ring of arms.

Long-hardened though she was to all alarms,
The perilous presage of an ill unknown
Thrilled through her, as she felt herself alone ;
And when she rose she reeled and almost fell
As in forced accents hardly audible
She bade her women run and bring her word
What was this stir and tumult that they heard.
Somehow she knew the answer they would bring,
Had she not known it long ago ? ' the King ! '
Her heart stopped beating and her sight grew dim,
And the King entered, and Death came with him ;
And ere his form unseen had passed the door
She caught his silent footsteps on the floor
And felt the chilling of his windless breath
And bowed her head and knew him straight for
Death.

And is not that the end ? Were it not well
To leave the story there, or must I tell
The last strange act of this old tragedy ?
Surely 'twere best that here the end should be
And here the heroine be left to rest
Quietly asleep. Yea, surely that were best.

But in this stormy space that men call life
Two rival powers are ever set in strife
Against each other, still resolved to prove
Love mightier than Death, or Death than Love.
And if Love pass the bars of mortal breath
He cries exulting, 'Lo, I conquer Death !'
Alas, we know not yet who Death may be,
But this we know, none is so strong as he.

A great Cathedral thronged in festal wise,
Hung thick with cloth of gold and tapestries ;
The strong Te Deum thrills all hearts and ears,
The organ's voice triumphant unto tears
Floods the ærial space from roof to ground
And dies in eddies of dissolving sound ;
But when the singing leaves the silence bare,
A hush of awe falls on the throbbing air ;
And each man turns and sees his fellow's face
White like his own, as though in that same place
With shuddering vision both had seen appear
The very features of incarnate fear.

Far up where blazoned Saints loom grave and
vast
The sun's rays streaming through the lattice cast

A line of light across the sanctuary,
And strike the gilded apse, where throned on high
The great Christ crowned blesses with hand and
face ;

The incense rises in the holy place,
But through the sacred dusk one may discern
Gold robes of priests and altar-lights that burn,—
And on a carven throne neath canopies
Of wrought Sicilian work, pale, with stern eyes,
Sits Pedro new-crowned King,—and by his side
Something, that once was Inez, ere she died,—
This only left of all that was so fair,
The exceeding pity of her golden hair ;
A spectre risen blind-eyed from the gloom
And kindlier silence of the shadowed tomb ;
Hailed by a name she living never bore,
Crowned wife, anointed Queen,—Ah, look no more !

O Love, was this well done ? Nay, hearken,
Love,
Although thy heart be breaking, hear thereof
The word within thine ear that Pity saith :
Love, be not thou more tyrannous than Death.

EXPLICIT

TO INEZ

*Five centuries are done and dead
Since thou knew'st love and hate, how keen,
Since on thy murdered golden head
They set pale gold and crowned thee Queen ;
Loves have been glad and sad between ;
Yet still thy name is sweet as spring,
Still to thy tomb must lover bring
Roses and rosemary and rue ;
And where shall singers find to sing
So sad a song the whole world through ?*

H. C. B.

NOTES

PAGE 6.

That once looked May-time.

ἔαρ θ' ὀρώσα Νυχτιά.

Theocritus, Hylas 45.

PAGE 7.

Ah fools and blind, &c.

ἄφρονες ἄνθρωποι καὶ νήπιοι εἴτε θανόντας
καλοῦσ' οὐδ' ἤβης ἄνθος ἀπολλόμενον.

Theognis, 1070 frag. Bergk.

PAGE 8.

Who even before her birth had come to her.

'Tradition asserts that her father, Don Pedro Pernañdez de Castro, and her mother Dona Aldonça Soares de Villadares, a noble Portuguese lady, were unmarried, and that Inez, and her two brothers were consequently of bastard birth.'

Æsc. Brit.

PAGE 8.

For long white throat and honey-coloured hair.

Inez was called Collo de Garza, or 'Heron's neck.'

PAGE 8.

Which show her children and despoiled her tomb.

'The monument, after repeatedly resisting the violence of curiosity, was broken into in 1810 by the French soldiery; the statue was mutilated, and the yellow hair was cut from the broken skeleton, to be preserved in reliquaries, and blown away by the wind. The children of Inez shared her habit of misfortune.'

PAGE 9.

Wailed for the wings of the shrill nightingale.

Æschylus, Ag. 1154.

PAGE 11.

Twain were the maidens and they had one heart.

'Deux estions, et n'avions qu'ung cuer.'

Villon.

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